

# WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

## Establishing a Prayer Team To Share God's Heart to Reach the Lost

### Conversion

I would like to share three remarkable stories with you - Stories of God's grace and gospel at work in the lives of three different individuals to **save them**. One of these stories comes from our core group, one from our outside ministry, and one from a sister church. And they all have two things in common: First, I can take no credit for any of them, and second, they are proof of how **God is amazingly on the move to save people and bring them home to Himself!**

The first story is from our **core group**. Rose (name changed, story used with permission) was one of the early people to join our group when we first began meeting and casting vision with this new group in the fall of last year. She grew up in a PCA church, but the faith had never become her own. She was not rebellious nor rejecting of the faith - it just was never personal for her, remaining in the realm of her parents' faith that she went along with. Now, on her own, living and working on the coast, Rose found her way to our core group and began to sit in on our Bible studies and our discussion of the gospel. She was quiet - but listening and taking things in, and Stephanie and I liked her right away. Then, a few months ago, Rose asked if she could meet with Stephanie and me - And when we met, she told us that for the first time, what was being taught and explained of the gospel "made sense" to her, and that she was believing it personally for the first time. As she shared this with us, and talked about how the Lord was working in her life in ways she had never felt before, bringing repentance and a desire to grow in Christ, Stephanie and I came to an exciting realization: Rose, who had been around Christianity her whole life - **had been saved!** With that, we had the privilege to celebrate with her, to cry tears of joy with her, to pray with her, and to begin to walk alongside her as she experienced spiritual life, sight, and growth for the first time for herself!



The second story I get to share with you is from the ministry **outside the core group**. Alex and I have known each other for a while. We have hung out, and we have talked about a lot of things concerning the faith and about life. Alex is a great guy, and I like him - but he was lost. Very lost. He described himself as an atheist, and I would add that he was an angry one. Then Alex and I lost touch, and I had not heard from him for quite a while. Until a few weeks ago...when the phone rang, and it was Alex calling. When I answered, Alex was excitedly saying, "Pastor Mark, **I've been saved!**" Honestly, I was in shock. I hate to admit it, but I was even a little doubtful. Trust me when I say that this guy was far from the gospel. But he came and spent a weekend with Stephanie and me - and the whole time he was bombarding us with questions about Jesus, and about how to know Jesus, and about how to grow in Jesus, and...well, it was all he could talk about! I had the privilege to spend an entire weekend answering question after question from a young man who, when we had last hung out, was angry, sullen, and lost - but who now could not take in the truths of Jesus fast enough! In fact, at one point during the weekend, I looked at Alex and told him, "Brother, the change



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is remarkable. You used to be so conflicted. But now you seem at peace.” And his answer was a simple but clear, “I feel at peace. It’s **what coming to Jesus has done for me.**” (Alex, by the way, is living in a different town now. It’s part of why we had not spent time together recently. So I have reached out to some brothers in that town who are going to take Alex under their wing and start discipling him. Yay, body of Christ!)

The third story is from **a sister church**, where Stephanie and I worshipped recently. While there, we had the privilege of seeing a man stand to be received into membership with his wife and newborn son. The pastor told the man’s story - how he had been lost in his sin, but how the Lord had brought the man into the reach of the church’s relationships....and the man had **been saved!** So now, as Stephanie and I and everyone else watched and celebrated with everyone else, this man knelt and was baptized, side by side with his son. It was as beautiful a picture as I have ever seen of the gospel and of God’s heart to change entire family trees and legacies with His grace by bringing lost people home to Himself.

So, in **our core group**, and then from **our outside ministry**, and then from **the church around us**, I have had the privilege to see **three lost adults come to salvation in Jesus Christ!** And in case I haven’t been clear enough - Let me state again: I can’t take credit for any of it. I am not the hero of this story. One case was somebody who got saved when I didn’t even realize she needed to be saved. Another was someone who used to be around my ministry - but who got saved after leaving it. And the third was a man I didn’t even know at all, but whom I had the privilege of standing and rejoicing with as he confessed Jesus publicly for the first time and was baptized. God did it! Our Father not only wants to save people - He is saving people! In each of these cases, I have simply had the privilege of watching living proof that **the gospel works**, and that it **changes lives** - That **the gospel changes everything!**

## **I can’t take credit for it - But I can point to it and say, “That is what we want to be about here”**

From top to bottom, beginning to end, I pray that this new church plant will be marked by a consuming passion to see the Great Commission completed in Ocean Springs, and the gospel go forward with life-saving power for salvation.

**It starts with our core group.** I am thankful for the group of believers God has brought to us in these opening months, and for how they are already bonding and connecting into the beginnings of a church. We are studying the Bible with them in our meetings, we are discovering the gospel together, and they are responding. In fact, one of the couples in our group recently stepped up and volunteered to lead singing and worship in our meetings, which is a great addition.

But, as we celebrate what God is doing among this “Band of Believers,” I am also aware that we have to be careful about “turning inward,” and seeking a church only to meet our own needs. As a friend of mine put it so well: **“Most of us PCA-ers want to see numbers fast, particularization soon, and buildings up as metrics of success. And that traps us into plants filled with believers who are mostly consumers....and who don’t have a missional bone in their bodies.”**

For that reason, I was glad when one of the young couples in our group asked me one night if they could share a testimony at the beginning of our meeting - And they told the group about how they had started to pray for a lost neighbor, a neighbor who is dying of alcoholism, and how after praying for her... That neighbor started coming over and hanging out on their porch, where they have started to have conversations with her, and are praying to be able to share the gospel with her! I am praising God for that testimony - For it is the core group pointing each other to a desire for God to use them to reach lost people!

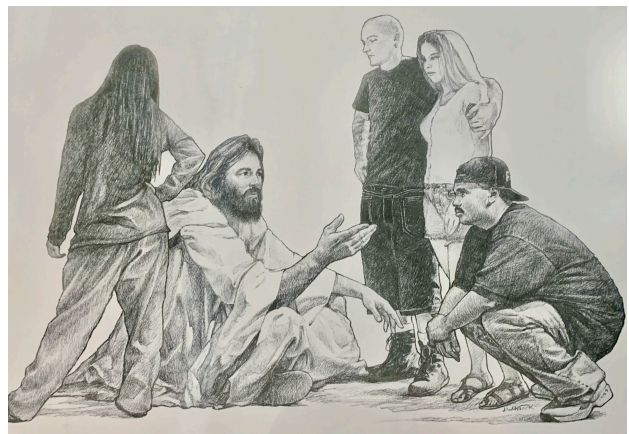
And then, with the core group, we are praying for God to **send us as missionaries to all of Ocean Springs**. I use that term deliberately. Yes, our goal in coming to Ocean Springs is that God will plant a church here - and not only here - but churches all up and down the coast. But in church planting, sometimes people start a new church, and other Christians come from other churches, and chairs and name-tags are re-arranged (something Tim Keller called “the circulation of the saints”), and if enough people gather at the new location - we celebrate that a new church has started. Oh, but friends - We can do that in our own power. And **we can do that and never add one person to the Kingdom of God!**

Instead, we are asking God to send us as missionaries. Missionaries get to know a culture. They build relationships with the people who live there. They enter into their lives and their stories. They work with other Christians who are there to establish a presence and to gain trust. And then they share the gospel - freely and eagerly. And, Lord willing, over time, lost people are saved by Jesus Christ, new believers are born, and a new church is formed. The biblical way. Out of the Great Commission, out of evangelism, and out of conversion!

As we go, we are finding fields “ripe unto harvest” throughout Ocean Springs. I could fill a hundred newsletters with stories of conversations and connections God is leading us to with lost people - even in this first year in Ocean Springs! We are finding people who are open, who are crying out, who are longing for connection. As another friend of mine told me when I first came here:

**“One distinctive of the Coast is the willingness for people to talk about their spiritual lives. They are neither surprised nor offended when the conversation arises. They have as many opinions as grains of sand about their beliefs, and their education in the Word is about one inch deep and one mile wide. So, put on your poker face, because you will hear everything, and you can’t look shocked or embarrassed. They are desperate for love and consideration, and not to be looked down on or disparaged. If you befriend them, then they will listen and are willing to be taught. This comes at a cost. You have to invest time in their lives, pastoring, shepherding, not preaching, but teaching and caring. They can discern the difference.”**

I cannot think of a better way to describe the heart and soul of what we are hoping to do on the mission field of Ocean Springs. It is about the gospel. It is about God saving lost people through drawing them to Jesus Christ!



## So as we head into November - Thank you!

In this month of Thanksgiving, please hear me clearly and gratefully thank each of you who are on our team. Your prayers are making a difference. Your partnering, investing, and supporting this ministry is making a difference. **People are being saved** - and we are praying for many more to be added to that story! My friends, as you pray:

- **Pray for these three new young believers who have been saved**, that they will be rooted and grounded in knowing Jesus.
- **Pray for the gospel to take root in our beginning core group**, that these believers would rejoice together in their identity in Christ - and that their awakening to grace would overflow in discipleship, in their marriages, in their families - and in their own sharing the gospel!
- **Pray for the spiritual warfare we encounter**. It comes through discouragements, family struggles, and criticisms from voices inside or outside. But we are very aware: The enemy does not want the gospel to come to Ocean Springs. But, with your prayers, he can't stop it!
- **And pray for new connections, conversations, and relationship roads for evangelism** among the lost here in Ocean Springs. God wants to save the lost - and He is going to do it, to His glory!

## Would You Be Part of This?

We are, of course, heading quickly into the holidays. And that means you will surely be inundated with good causes asking you to give. I will not try to compete with that. But I will promise that we are seeing God move in amazing, tangible ways here in Ocean Springs – And I believe **that story is just beginning**. We are praying that eternity itself will be different through what God does to **save lives** and **build His church** here in Ocean Springs...and beyond! And your gift, big or small, one-time or recurring, can be something God uses powerfully in what He has planned here on the coast. Here is how you can give - and Thank You!

Use the QR code to the right, or visit <http://give.pcamna.org/to/1749>

- Checks can also be sent payable to "Mission to North America"  
PO Box 890233  
Charlotte, NC, 28289-02333  
(Write "Mark Horn, Ocean Springs Church Plant" on the memo line)
- More information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs story can be found at our website: [www.PlantHopeOS.org](http://www.PlantHopeOS.org)



### A closing encouragement:

"As wise stewards of the mystery of Christ, we must subscribe to a definition of biblical church planting as evangelism that results in new churches." - J. D. Payne